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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000143

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2019

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PAKISTANI AMBASSADOR ON HIS
COUNTRY'S WOES AND HOPES FOR AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with the Charge, Pakistan's Ambassador to Turkmenistan spoke in frank terms of his country's difficulties. He said he hopes that the U.S. will now pay more attention to resolving the war in Afghanistan, where he served as a diplomat both during the rule of the Taliban and after the U.S. invasion. Afghanistan, he said, is still divided almost exclusively along tribal lines, something the U.S. needs to understand if we expect to see an end to the conflict there. END SUMMARY.

PAKISTAN'S PLIGHT

¶2. (C) During an introductory meeting with the Charg on January 28, Said Afridi, Pakistan's ambassador to Turkmenistan, said he hopes that under President Obama, the U.S. will begin to pay much greater attention to the conflict in Afghanistan. He said that in many ways Pakistanis, particularly civilians, have suffered "much more than either the Afghan or American people" as a result of the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan. He noted that while the U.S. has the "resources, technology and manpower" to fight the Taliban in the mountainous, border areas or "tribal belt" with Afghanistan, the Pakistanis do not. Pakistan also suffered during what he termed the "Jihad period" (the conflict in Afghanistan between the USSR and the Mujaheddin), and said that the U.S. had "facilitated" the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan after the Soviet army departed.

¶3. (C) Afridi hoped that Special Representative Holbrooke will appreciate Pakistan's plight, particularly its economic difficulties. No one is investing in Pakistan, expat businesses are leaving, and Pakistani importers now operate out of Dubai. Even the sports teams are suffering, he said, with foreign teams reluctant to travel to Pakistan to participate in athletic events. He said the U.S. does support Pakistan economically and militarily, but that this is "insufficient" given the circumstances the country finds itself in.

¶4. (C) Referring to the U.S. and Pakistan as "long-standing allies," Afridi said the relations between our two countries have had their "ups and downs," but we nevertheless maintain a solid alliance that has existed since the Cold War. In the same vein, he said Pakistan really has no significant

commercial or military relations with Russia. Pakistan has been unable to purchase Russian military aircraft, because the Russians "don't trust us," partly because of their experience in Afghanistan, and treat us simply as a "U.S. ally."

15. (C) Afridi, himself a native of a the Afghan border area of Pakistan, which he called "stunningly beautiful" ("It used to be the Switzerland of Pakistan, but al-Qaida and the Taleban have made it a hell"), served as Consul General in Jalalabad during the rule of the Taliban, and was there during the U.S. cruise missile strikes following the attacks on U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. He was later appointed Pakistan's High Commissioner for Afghanistan. He said that it was unfortunate that Zahir Shah was not ultimately restored as head of state when he returned to Afghanistan in 2002. Zahir Shah enjoyed much "more respect" from the Afghan people than President Karzai, who he said continues to be perceived as "too American."

16. (C) The Ambassador called the attacks in the border areas by U.S. drone aircraft a "very irritating issue," saying that most of the people who have been killed are innocent civilians. He said the problem is that the U.S. continues to believe that Osama Bin Laden is hiding out in the frontier areas, saying, "Why do they keep saying he is in that area? If they can locate and kill other terrorists in the area, they would be able to find Bin Laden, too." He hoped that President Obama would live up to his promise of change, particularly towards current U.S. military conflicts. "What has America achieved through using force the past

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eight years. Look at the cost?" The use of force, he said, "must be accompanied by political dialogue." He went on to say that the Afghan people are unsure of U.S. intentions in their country, and believe that U.S. aid and assistance is not being carried out for the sake of Afghanistan, but only to serve U.S. interests.

AFGHANISTAN STILL DIVIDED ALONG TRIBAL LINES

17. (C) Calling Afghanistan's internal divisions "purely tribal," Ambassador Afridi said that the U.S. needs to understand "why the Pushtuns are so against them." He noted as well that the Taliban are 100 percent Pushtun, the ethnic group that has traditionally ruled Afghanistan, and "do not want to be ruled by outsiders" (i.e. Tajiks, Uzbeks, or any other ethnic group). He said that U.S. officials once asked his opinion while he was High Commissioner in Kabul in 2002, about an "acceptable Pushtun" who could lead Afghanistan, and that at the time he had recommended the former Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Mutawakil, who was "considered a moderate, not a real hardliner," Gulbudin Hekmatyar, or Haji Kadir (who was later killed in Kabul, he said). The Farsi-speaking Parsiban, led by Haji Ismail, are a Shia group that receive support from Iran, he said.

TURKMEN GOVERNMENT: NO INTEREST IN PAKISTAN'S PROBLEMS

18. (C) Afridi said that despite the existence of a community of ethnic Turkmen in Pakistan, who are known for their carpet-weaving skills, the Turkmen government has shown little interest in either Pakistan or its problems, preferring to invoke their policy of neutrality rather than become involved in any way.

19. (C) COMMENT: We found Ambassador Afridi to be a very frank and forthright interlocutor, with a wealth of knowledge about Afghanistan. One does not have to agree with him to appreciate his experience and political insight. END COMMENT.
MILES